

April 20, 2006 - Slaughter Calls for Clarification of Comments on Border Crossing

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, April 20, 2006

Slaughter Calls for Clarification of Comments on Border Crossing
Canadian Official's Statement Signals Possible Reversal in US Policy on Border Travel

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, today sent a letter to Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff asking for a clarification of statements he made yesterday to Canada's Public Safety Minister, Stockwell Day, following a meeting of the two officials.

Minister Day told reporters that he had been informed by Secretary Chertoff that forms of documentation currently accepted for border crossing, such as a drivers license or a birth certificate, would still be

permissible even after the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) has been implemented .

Mr. Day added that drivers using currently accepted forms of ID could face longer delays at the border than they are used to.

"Given the critical economic impact this issue has on border communities and the tourism industry, we need to know if DHS has reversed its position on this policy," Rep. Slaughter said. "That is why I have called on Secretary Chertoff to clarify his statements to Canadian officials as soon as possible."

For over a year, Rep. Slaughter has led the effort in Congress to ensure that any new border plan, such as WHTI, would not pose an undue burden on legitimate cross-border travel. If such a burden existed, it would dramatically hurt border economies both within the United States and Canada.

"Measures have to be taken to ensure that our border with Canada remains protected but also open to travel and trade." Rep. Slaughter said. "If what is being reported is true, then this is a clear acknowledgement that DHS's passport requirement is unworkable in its current form."

The complete text of Rep. Slaughter's letter follows:

The Honorable Michael Chertoff

Secretary

United States Department of Homeland Security

Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff,

I am writing to seek clarification on the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) plan to implement the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI). Stockwell Day, the Canadian government's Public Safety Minister, was quoted in the Canadian press today as saying, "You're still going to be able to come back to the United States with a driver's license, with some kind of birth certificate, but you may be in a slower line. They're going to use that, I think, as an incentive to try and get more Americans to buy into this concept of a national ID card." Minister Day indicated that you gave him this guarantee at a meeting on Tuesday, April 18th. If Minister Day's comments are accurate, they represent a significant change to the documentation requirements that DHS has maintained will be acceptable for border crossings.

As you know, the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act requires the Department of Homeland Secretary, in consultation with the Department of State, to develop a plan to require a passport or other documents denoting identity and citizenship for all travel into the United States. DHS and State first announced plans to implement this requirement last April, and maintained that travelers will need to present a passport or yet-to-be defined alternative documents to re-enter the U.S. from the anywhere in the Western Hemisphere beginning in 2008 .

I personally met with Elaine Dezenski, the then Acting Assistant Secretary for the Border and Transportation Security Directorate, on April 14, 2005. I asked Ms. Dezenski to explain why DHS and State could not codify the current requirements of a birth certificate and driver's license for border crossings, as the combination of the two documents meet the requirements of the new law. The answer provided to me was that driver's licenses and birth certificates are unsecure documents and do not include much-needed biometric identifiers. In October, Ms. Dezenzki accepted my invitation to meet with regional officials in Buffalo to discuss WHTI. At that forum, she again reiterated that driver's licenses and birth certificates are unsecure and would not be allowed under WHTI. Since that time, DHS and State have continued to assert that travelers will need to carry a passport or a yet-to-be defined alternative document for border crossings, and that drivers' licenses and birth certificates will not be accepted.

At no time in the past year has DHS or State given any indication that they will allow driver's licenses and birth certificates under WHTI. Accordingly, I was surprised to read Minister Day's statements that you gave him your personal commitment that DHS will still accept birth certificates and driver's licenses. Minister Day's comments indicate a major reversal in the Department of Homeland Security's position on implementation of WHTI.

The unintended consequences of WHTI continue to threaten the future of cross-border trade and tourism. It is imperative that DHS quickly and clearly states what documents will be acceptable for border crossings. I, therefore, respectfully request that you confirm whether or not the Administration has reversed its policy on WHTI, and will allow travelers to present a driver's license and birth certificate for entry into the United State from Canada. I appreciate your attention into this matter, and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Louise Slaughter

Member of Congress

cc. The Honorable Condoleezza Rice, U.S. Secretary of State

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